

History of American cemetery, memorial

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Nestled in a quiet corner of rural Cambridgeshire, surrounded only by fields and trees, you will find the Cambridge American Cemetery and Memorial. Madingly lies just north of the A14 to the west of Cambridge, and this is where Monday's memorial service will be held.

Location

You may ask, "Why Cambridge?" East Anglia's flat landscape made a natural landing field for aircraft, so there was an abundance of military airfields established before and during World War II. Also, this is an area where a large number of American casualties occurred.

The cemetery was first established Dec. 7, 1943, the second anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. The 30.5 acre cemetery site was donated by the University of Cambridge. Construction of the cemetery and memorial was completed in 1956, and was dedicated July 16 that year.

Cemetery

There are 3,811 American war dead buried at the cemetery. There are also a few headstones from other nations. The fan-shaped graves are arranged in quarter circles in a wide sweep across the green lawns -- a view best appreciated from the path near the memorial. The headstones are aligned like the spokes of a wheel, which can be seen from a point at the north edge of the flagpole platform. Each grave plot is enclosed by a boxwood hedge.

The Wall of the Missing

The Wall of the Missing is 472 feet long and built of Portland stone, a limestone quarried in the south of England. The names and particulars of 5,125 missing are recorded here. Above the names is an extract, running the full length of the wall, from the dedication by President Dwight D. Eisenhower of the Golden Book. The Golden Book is now enshrined in St. Paul's Cathedral, London. Along the wall are four statues representing a soldier, a sailor, an airman and a Coast Guardsman in their typical uniforms and with their weapons.

The memorial

Also in Portland stone, the memorial is 85 feet long, 30 feet wide and 28 feet high. On the north face of the memorial are five pylons, each inscribed with a date representing the five years from 1941 to 1945 in which the United States participated in the War. The main doors are of teakwood and bear bronze models of military equipment and naval vessels.

The memorial is divided into a large museum chamber and a devotional chapel. The museum has one map compiled by American artist Herbert Gute from data prepared by the American Battle Monuments Commission. It shows the principal sea routes across the Atlantic and the types of naval and other craft which supported the supply of men and munitions to the European areas of operation. Also shown are the air routes used by the United States Army Air Corps and the Royal Air Force.

Another map on the south wall shows

the sites in the United Kingdom loaned to the Armed Forces of the United States for preparation and support of military operations. Air, sea and invasion routes that were necessary for the build-up from January 1942 - June 1944, the D-Day landings in Normandy, France, are indicated. This map was compiled by an English artist, David Kindersley, using data supplied by the American Battle Monuments Commission.

Other features include a mosaic ceiling over the altar depicting aircraft making their final flight toward Glory; the seals of the War and Navy Departments set in glass beside and above the main door; and the seals of the states of the union arranged in vertical rows from left to right in the order in which they entered the union.

The chapel

The words "Into Thy Hands, O Lord" are inscribed in bronze characters over the teakwood doorway in the chapel. The words "faith" and "hope" are set into the chancel rails, also in bronze. A mosaic behind the altar purports to interpret the supreme moment described in the Scriptures in which the archangel sounds his trumpet to announce the coming of the Resurrection and the Last Judgment.

Opening times

The cemetery is open every day of the year, including holidays. Summer opening times are from 8 a.m. - 6 p.m. April 16 - Sept. 30, and winter opening times are from 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. Oct. 1 - April 15.

